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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ AND GAZA WITHDRAWAL

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, August 15, focuses on Israel's withdrawal from Gaza with reports about preparations for the withdrawal and the start of evacuation of settlements. Another front-page story is related to the Iraqi draft constitution and the parliamentary deliberations scheduled to begin today.

Editorial Commentary

-- "The strategic dimensions of the Gaza withdrawal"

Columnist Lamis Andoni writes on the op-ed page of independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (08/15): "As Israel begins "withdrawing" from Gaza Strip, analyses about the importance of this historic moment vary: is a victory for the Palestinian resistance or is a unilateral Israeli decision designed to overcome the Palestinian people's accomplishments? Ariel Sharon, the father of settlers, would not have undertaken such a dramatic step as that of evacuating the settlements unless he had to. Despite criticisms against the Palestinian Intifada, the Israeli decision was the result of all forms of Palestinian resistance, the peaceful ones and violent ones. This is because, at no time in the history of mankind has a direct occupation ever retreated unless under duress from political, material and human losses.. Yet, the Israeli decision is also an attempt to abort the accomplishments of the resistance, that is to say from the standpoint of the Palestinian national liberation and the Palestinian people's exercising their national rights.. From this viewpoint, the unilateral disengagement plan from Gaza marks the most significant political and media blow in favor of Sharon, in the sense that this step will come a long way in covering up the crime of occupation, of annexing lands, of keeping settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and of belittling the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.. Here lies the importance of unilateral disengagement plan: on one hand, this plan prevents the Palestinian party from legitimizing a very serious step that leads to withdrawal from Gaza while Israel continue to close its grip on the West Bank and Jerusalem and to keep Gaza under the mercy of the political, military and economic control; on the other hand, Sharon's refusal to hold negotiations about the disengagement with the Palestinian Authority exposes the racist colonialist core of a policy that does not recognize the presence of a people on the land of Palestine. The decision as far as Sharon is considered, despite the fact that it came under pressure from the Palestinian resistance, remains within the realms of exercising and entrenching Israel's power.. In view of the above, any internal Palestinian argument that does not take into consideration the historical ideas of Zionism or that tries to belittle the importance of resistance throughout history is doomed to enter a destructive cycle of political debate between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas about the control over Gaza, and this would not serve the concept of the Palestinian national liberation."

-- "Weapons to fight the occupation only"

Daily columnist Rakan Majali writes on the back-page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (08/15): "On one hand, the Palestinian National Authority is entitled to insist on maintaining security in the Gaza Strip and to manage its affairs after the Israeli withdrawal without competition from any other force. On the other, Hamas and other factions are entitled to hold on to their weapons and their capabilities as resistance movements against the occupation so long as the occupation continues to exist in the territories of the West Bank.. It is no secret that the resistance is in the best interest of

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the Palestinian National Authority that is going to find itself in any future negotiations completely helpless and devoid of any bargaining chips and will then have to succumb to Israel because Israel does not give concessions just for the sake of the Palestinian Authority."

-- "Federalism is the antithesis of separation"

Columnist Mohammad Abu Rumman writes on the op-ed page of independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (08/15): "Even if we assume that the Iraqi Parliament was able to agree on the constitution in time for the deadline of August 15, it would not mean that dangerous and serious scenarios have been averted. This is for two reasons. The first is that the Sunnis are still outside the context of the political process that threatens to render the entire process a failure, and the second is that the draft constitution is based on favoring sectarianism over general interests. The probable scenario is that the draft constitution would be approved on time with some pending issues remaining, and the most significant of the pending issues is how willing are the Iraqis to live together and to have national unity, and, judging from the current indications, this is not going to be supported. We do not expect the Iraqis to be freed from the ghosts of the past that instill a tendency for separatism and negativity. What needs to be done, therefore, is to postpone the passing of the constitution until that time when there is consensus on a wider scale and that is by bringing the Sunnis into the political process and stressing the concept of co-existence. This is the real guarantee and infrastructure that is necessary for any constitution or political arena in the new Iraq."

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